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TRAINING TO SERVE THE ELDERLY

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"A man is not old
as long as he
is seeking something."

Jean Rostand

Rapid aging of the American population creates need for more and more trained, qualified people who can serve older people with more knowledge and skill.

Without qualified personnel, it would not be possible to build health and social services. And it would be impossible to work towards other objectives set by the Older Americans Act—educational and recreational activities, better housing, adequate income, employment opportunities and full protection of older people's civil and legal rights.

Training and education play key roles in strengthening the nation's capacity to serve older people and in developing a comprehensive system of care and services for older people in communities throughout the United States. These are paramount aims of the Administration on Aging (AoA). Other main goals are the development of long term care services in community contexts for chronically disabled elderly and the integration of older people into the mainstream of American society.

". . . to promote greater well-being for older people by preparing the people who work with them and on their behalf . . ."

When the Administration on Aging was established in 1965 by enactment of the Older Americans Act, training and education were among the first activities it supported.

Across the years the purpose of these programs has remained constant: to promote greater well-being for older people by preparing the people who work with them and on their behalf to give a higher performance.

More than 130,000 persons working in aging fields have received training supported by AoA. These persons range from professors of gerontology to volunteer workers in senior centers, and from State aging unit directors to nursing home ombudsmen.

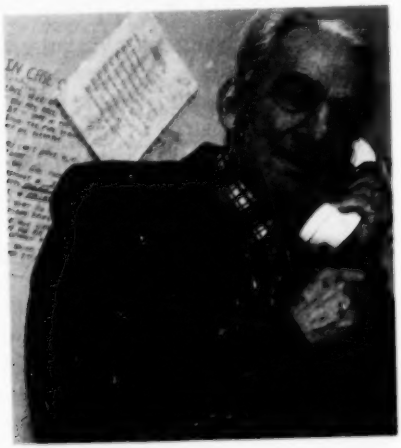
Their training has contributed dramatically to the buildup of the national aging network since its establishment in 1973. The network now covers virtually every part of the United States. About 90 percent of AoA fund appropriations are funneled through the network to help run nutrition programs, senior centers and a broad variety of social services for many millions of older people.

Some AoA programs aim less at recruiting students directly into aging fields than at improving the capacity of schools to adjust curricula to the imperatives of an aging population. These adjustments may be as important at high school and community college level as in professional schools of law, psychology and urban development.

Other AoA grants help colleges and universities develop a broader range of aging studies or specialization in a certain aspect of aging. A high proportion of American institutes of higher learning now offer courses in aging. The National Directory of Educational Programs in Gerontology lists programs in 1,275 colleges and universities in the United States.

Throughout its programs, AoA fosters coordinated approaches to education and training, promoting greater interchange, understanding and linkages among universities, State and area agencies on aging, and service providers in each region.

For example, educators from all levels are brought together to discuss common opportunities and problems, assess manpower needs, inventory education resources and develop better ways of using limited education and training resources.



" . . . to build the on-the-job skills and knowledge of persons who work in senior centers and nutrition programs . . . "

Professional Careers in Education

AoA supports Gerontology Career Preparation Programs at about 80 universities and other institutions of higher education. About one-third of all AoA education and training funds go to this program. The AoA grants help build the capacity of the recipient schools to offer gerontology education at bachelor, masters and doctorate levels. In most cases the grants also help the schools to provide financial assistance to students. Programs focus on such areas as:

- Supervision of social health service delivery,
- Planning, management and policy formation in programs for older people,
- Service delivery to special groups such as minority elderly, rural elderly or developmentally disabled older persons.
- Supervision or practice in case management and service management.

The Career Preparation programs are targeted towards specialized career training focused on the priorities of the Older Americans Act such as long-term care, minority elderly and case management.

State Education and Training

Another major part of the AoA education and training effort works through the State agencies on aging. It helps build the on-the-job skills and knowledge of staff of State and area agencies on aging and of personnel of community-based service providers including persons who work in nutrition programs, senior centers, social service, and other activities serving older people. About one-third of the AoA education and training budget goes to this purpose.

With these funds a State may, for example, take a new area agency and make sure the personnel get the training they need to perform effectively. Or a State may take key program personnel from dozens of nutrition projects throughout the State and give them the training they need to handle problems older people bring to nutrition sites. Or a selected group of social service and public health workers might be sent to the State university for a short course in case management. Volunteers often get training under State programs, as more than 200,000 volunteers work in the aging network nationwide. Many have little training before being on the front line with older people, helping them handle troublesome situations in their lives. Training the State programs provide may help them know what to do when problems come up.

National Continuing Education

This program focuses on development of in-service and continuing education for personnel in a range of professional disciplines encompassing nursing, medicine, various therapies, home service, social sciences and many other fields. Its purpose is to develop education and training materials and redesign curricula to keep abreast of current and future needs of older people.

Geriatric Fellowship Program

Most medical schools have given scant attention to the growing body of knowledge concerning clinical and case management problems that occur with older patients. But now some medical faculties are showing more interest in aging. The geriatric fellowship program develops medical school faculty who can serve as educators and leaders in training future physicians and other health care specialists in geriatric medicine, nursing and related fields.

" . . . minority students have historically been underrepresented in aging professions . . . "

Minority Recruitment

A special AoA-supported program promotes recruitment, training and placement of minority students in aging professions, where they have historically been underrepresented. The program will benefit minority elderly, directly and indirectly, with appropriate services provided by well-trained minority professionals. The minorities targeted in this program are Blacks, Hispanics, native Americans and Asians.

Multidisciplinary Centers of Gerontology

This program provides funds to develop university centers which focus on particular problems of aging such as long-term care or serving minority elderly, and which radiate information on aging into a broad spectrum of courses and disciplines throughout the university curricula. The special emphasis centers will be focal points for carrying out integrated programs of training and practice, research and technical assistance to community services within their subjects of special emphasis.

How to Find Out More About Training Opportunities

A good source of information on university and college programs and student assistance is the National Directory of Educational Programs in Gerontology, prepared under an AoA grant to the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. As well as information on tuition grants and training money, it indicates which schools older adults may attend without payment of fees. The volume is available in many reference libraries and may be ordered from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., at $9.35.

State Offices of Aging are usually best sources of information on aging study programs within the State.

The Education and Training Office of the Administration on Aging, 330 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. can provide a list of the universities holding AoA Career Preparation grants, and a copy of AoA Fact Sheet "Careers and Training in Gerontology".

Of course, Financial Assistance offices of colleges and universities are usually excellent sources of information on grants and loans.

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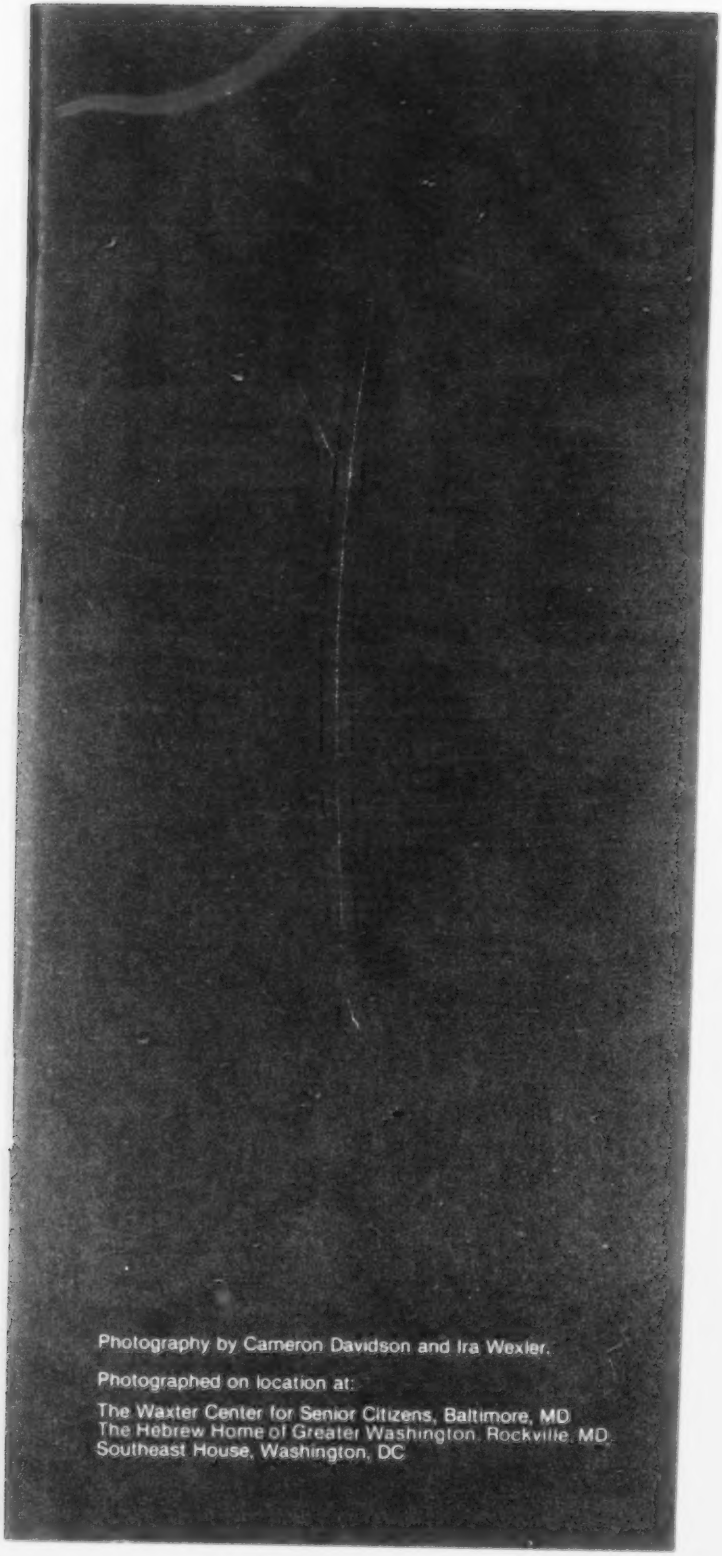

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